

There is no image of language

Language, Culture and Content

Aiming for Socialism with South African Characteristics has to mean that South African things are important to South Africans.

This includes all of their languages. But further than that, it means that each language is recognised as a bearer of culture, and that similarly, all the South African languages must expand to embrace the content of our joint South African reality.

Each language is a medium, and languages as such are media with special characteristics. To illustrate the special character of language as a cultural medium, consider that it appears to be impossible to illustrate with a graphic image, what “Language with South African Characteristics” might be.

Hence, although in all of these interactions there is one, and occasionally more than one, image used to epitomise what is being discussed, yet on this occasion it proves not to be possible to find such an image. Nor will a touristic combination of many images help. Nor will a slogan like “unity in diversity”.

Nothing can compare with a language in the sense of it being a single body, but capable of expressing everything that it needs to express. If it is not capable, then it can borrow or invent new ways, while still continuing to be its unique self as a language.

“In the beginning was the Word”: Human beings are distinguished from other animals by their possession of language. It is language that allows humans to generate a collective consciousness that can create, and continue to create itself.

Kenya's Independent School Movement (extract)

**James Stanfield, University of Newcastle upon Tyne,
Economic Affairs, June 2005**

Following a ban on female circumcision by three missionary societies in 1929, the Kikuyu in Central Province began to boycott mission schools and demanded an end to the monopoly on education held by the missions. After failing to persuade the government to open its own secular schools free from missionary control, the Kikuyu began to open their own. During the early 1930s extensive fundraising activities therefore took place, school buildings were erected and self help groups formed.

Each independent school was governed by a local committee, responsible for the recruitment and payment of teachers, the setting of school fees and other fundraising events. As independent schools became established joint meetings were organised and at a gathering in August 1934 the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA) was set up. While KISA emphasised the need to negotiate with the colonial authorities some independent schools wanted to remain entirely free from direct European influence. A rival association, the Kikuyu Karing'a Education Association (KKEA), was therefore established soon after.

By 1939 there were 63 Kikuyu independent schools educating a total of 12,964 pupils.

To help meet the increasing demand for trained teachers both KISA and KKEA agreed to support the opening, in 1939, of Kenya's first teacher training college at Githunguri, the site of the Kikuyu's first independent school. Originally intended to train teachers, the College soon included an elementary, primary and secondary school, with enrolments increasing to over 1,000 by 1947. It was this independent school/college which Jomo Kenyatta would later become the principle of, providing a base for his future campaign for Presidency. The rest of course is history.

A police investigation of Mau Mau early in 1952 sealed the fate of the independent schools. When the

government declared a state of emergency later that year, both KISA and KKEA schools were closed.

From: <http://egwestcentre.com/2005/06/13/kenyas-forgotten-independent-school-movement/>

The above account of the Kikuyu Independent Schools poses them as a reaction, not in the first place to colonialism, but to the missionaries' banning of female circumcision (genital mutilation), a practice that has few open defenders today, although male genital mutilation is having a come-back in the guise of being a prophylactic against HIV and AIDS.

But in fact these schools were part of the resistance to colonialism, and part of a cultural/political movement that helped to preserve the whole Kikuyu culture, quite apart from the question of female circumcision. No doubt they contributed to the health of the language, which is the language in which Ngugi wa Thiong'o continues to write, today.

In the last part of the Course we will use a piece of Ngugi's writing

How to learn languages?

In African countries, and notably in South Africa, people commonly speak many languages, but very little language-teaching is taking place. So, how are people managing to learn so many languages?

It would appear that informal methods of propagating language-learning are far more efficient than the formal ones, at least to the level of conversation, and oral commerce.

The CU is based on a theory of teaching and learning (in fact, on a pedagogy of the oppressed) in which dialogue is the source of learning, the practice and the method. We see no reason why languages should not also be taught and learned in this same fashion. Collective groups or study circles can be used for language, so that language is learned socially.

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